

7 KEYS TO AN EFFECTIVE MINISTRY



A Leadership Lifter
From Rick Warren

SEVEN KEYS TO AN EFFECTIVE MINISTRY

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Next to Jesus Christ Himself the greatest model of ministry is the Apostle Paul. As you do your ministry, whether you're a Sunday School teacher or a lay pastor or any of the many various ministries we have here at the church, you need to constantly remember seven principles for an effective ministry. In Romans 15, Paul gives us an inside view of his own ministry.

v. 14 he says "I am myself convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge, competent to instruct one another." Underline "you're competent to instruct one another." Paul is saying that you're competent to minister. You've got what it takes. You don't have to feel "I could never do that." But if you'll just start serving the Lord, He will give you the competence you need to take those first steps.

The key words in Romans 15 are the words "minister" and "service". The word "minister" is used in v. 16 and the word "service" is used in v. 17, 25, and 31. We're going to look at these Seven Keys to an Effective Ministry. But first a little background.

If you read down this passage you'll find that Paul had two

different types of ministries. A ministry to unbelievers and a ministry to believers. His ministry to unbelievers is v. 14-22 was to share the good news. He says, "My mission in life is to share the good news with as many people as possible." Specifically it was to share it with the Gentiles, those non-Jews. He also then had a ministry to believers in v. 23-33. He tells us his ministry was to meet the needs of believers.

What had happened here was Paul had collected an offering from the Gentile churches all over Asia Minor to be delivered to the Jews in Jerusalem who had become believers – the Jerusalem church. The point I want to make is every Christian needs a ministry and a mission. You need a ministry to believers and a mission to unbelievers. Paul demonstrates this here.

In v. 16 we have Paul's message. He says here that his message was the good news. That's a good thing to have to share. The mission in life is not to go out and tell people that they're dying and going to hell but to go out and tell them that they can be forgiven and they can go to heaven. That's something I can get excited about. It's a positive message. It's a message of good news.

Paul's motive in v. 17 was to bring glory to God. He wanted to bring glory to God in everything that he did. Every time you share your faith with somebody, you bring glory to God. Every time you tell the gospel to a friend, you bring glory to God. His message was the good news. His motive was to bring glory to God.

v. 19, he tells us about the miracles that he did. He says that they were all done by the power of the Holy Spirit. They weren't just something Paul worked up on his own. God did miraculous things. We've heard some stories tonight how God's done neat things in the lives of people who were totally dedicated to Him. They didn't happen because of us. They happened because of God's Spirit.

v. 19, Paul gives us his ministry area. He says it was from Jerusalem to Illyricum. Illyricum is Yugoslavia. He is basically saying, "My ministry area (and he had it defined) was from Israel to Yugoslavia." God used him in starting churches all over there. That's what most of the New Testament is about.

His method was starting new churches. He said in v. 20 "It's always been my ambition to preach the Gospel where Christ was not known so I would not be building on someone else's

foundation.” I had the same ambition as Paul. I didn’t want to build on anyone else’s foundation. I wanted to just go and let the Lord use me to start a church from scratch. One nice thing about when you start a church yourself, you know that all the problems in it are your fault. You don’t blame anybody else. Frankly, you don’t have to put up with anybody else’s problems either that you inherited. I can handle problems as long as I know I created them. It’s much harder to deal with problems you didn’t cause. Some of you have had to do that in jobs that you inherited, clean up a mess that somebody else had left.

That’s the background. I want to spend our time on these seven keys of an effective ministry. Regardless of where God uses you or how God uses you, it has to have these seven functions to have God’s blessing on it.

1. An effective ministry is based on God’s grace.

v. 15-16 he says, “Because of the grace God gave me to be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles.” I think the first thing you have to realize is that you don’t deserve to be in the

ministry. I don't deserve to be a Christian, much less be in the ministry. I don't deserve forgiveness, much less to be able to be used by God. That's an extra, added privilege. Constantly, we need to remind ourselves, God is using me in this place of service, in the Saddleback body, simply because of His grace.

Grace is the fact that God knows every stupid mistake I'll make in the ministry and yet He has chosen me. That's what grace is.

Just because you're serving the Lord, doesn't mean you're not going to make any mistakes. You will. Many times you'll stumble and you'll fumble and you'll do things that embarrass yourself. You'll do the wrong thing and you'll say, "What in the world am I doing?" Just because you're a minister of God doesn't mean you're perfect. You're not. I'm not. None of us are. Grace is the fact that God uses imperfect people. If He only used perfect people to get the job done, what would get done? Nothing. And if He only used super saints who are mature in every area of life to get the job done, what would get done? Nothing. We are all Becomers. We are all on the road. I like to say that we're maturing ministers. We're not matured ministers. We're maturing ministers. While we're growing, we're giving. While we're growing, we're serving. That's the goal - grace. Ministry is received not achieved. Just like

everything else in your life, it's by grace. It's a gift. Everything God does in your life, through your life, for your life He does by grace through faith. It's not something you work for or earn. You didn't work for or earn your salvation. You don't work or earn the right to minister. It's a gift that God gives us.

Sometimes people'll say, "I've got too many faults for God to use me." I want to say, "You need to understand that ministry is based on grace." When somebody comes to you and says, "Who do you think you are serving there in lay ministry at Saddleback?" You say, "Wrong question. It's not who I think I am. It's who is God?" Then you say, "I'm a trophy of God's grace." That's what we all are - trophies of God's grace. He uses very ordinary people.

2. An effective ministry is not only based on God's grace; it's built on God's word.

He says, "I have the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God." What is the gospel? The Bible. This is the guidebook for ministry. Not anything else. I want to encourage you as a member of the CORE to particularly become well acquainted with 1 and 2 Timothy and the book of Titus. You, as someone who's involved in ministry in your church, need to be very

familiar with these books because they're written to people in the ministry. As you read these books, read them as Paul were writing not to Timothy or Titus, but directly to you. They are guidelines for service. The guidelines that are given in Timothy and Titus are guidelines we want all the people in our church who are serving in the CORE in the ministry to be involved in. It's based on God's word.

Acts 20:32 "I give to you the word of grace which is able to build you up." 2 Timothy 3:16-17 "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction in righteousness that the man or woman of God may be thoroughly furnished unto every good work." Phillips translation: "That we may have the comprehensive equipment to serve God."

This is our equipment, our manual, our tool.

3. The third mark of a ministry that God really blesses is it's done for Gods glory.

It's not built to promote a personality. Paul wanted people to be more impressed with God than he wanted people to be

impressed with himself. "Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. I will not speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me." He says God did it through me. He serves in the ministry for the glory of God.

This is one of the things that really concerns me about super stars out there in ministry. It's very important we realize that God does things through people. Many times what happens when you start serving in ministry is that your gifts start to develop in one area. They get bigger and bigger and bigger. Spiritual gifts are like muscles; the more you use them, the bigger they get. You're gifted in a certain area and God's using that but you know of other areas that aren't up to snuff yet. You say, "How in the world can I be teaching a Sunday School class? I'm still struggling in...." You need to realize that your gift is always bigger than you are. You need to realize that God often gives His greatest gifts to the weakest people. Why? So that we lay humble before the Lord. And that we trust Him and we don't think that it all depends on us.

The person who is totally competent in every area of their life, I'm not interested in them serving in our church. The one thing that God judges faster than anything else is pride. And the moment you become filled with pride, God takes His hand off

blessing off your ministry. I'd much rather have somebody who recognizes his great strengths but also sees his weaknesses.

Humility is being honest about your weaknesses and recognizing that your strengths are gifts from God. You don't have to be ashamed of your strength or say you're not strong in that area. You are. Just recognize who gave it to you. God gave it to you. Some of you are good with numbers. Some of you are good with words. Some of you are good with people. Some of you are good at organizing. Some of you are good at crafts. Some of you have musical talent. Others of us... tough luck! We're prison singers - always behind a few bars and never have the right key. We have a voice that needs to be cultivated - plowed under! But the Bible does say, "Make a joyful noise." Even pigs can do that! They're happy when they're eating.

But the fact is you are a bundle of strengths and weaknesses. You recognize your strengths are from God and you work on your weaknesses at the same time. You do it all for the glory of God.

Some people think Paul had an ego problem. I used to think he did. Six or seven times in the New Testament, Paul says, "Follow me as I follow Christ." Would you ever say that to

somebody? I don't think I'd ever say that. I used to think, "What kind of ego trip is this guy on?" Then I realized he was just being honest. He was making an attempt to live for Christ. He wasn't saying he was perfect. He was saying, At least I'm trying. I'd rather have people follow somebody who's at least making the effort than following somebody who's making no effort at all -- some rock star or something. You should be able to say with confidence, "Follow me as I follow Christ." It does not mean you've got it all together. You're never going to have it all together until you get to heaven. But you need to be able to say, "Follow me as I follow Christ because my heart is in this direction. That's where my heart is. That's where I want to go. That's where I want to be. I'm not perfect but that's where I want to be." So we help people in that kind of ministry.

4. A ministry that is effectively blessed by God is performed in God's power.

He says, "By the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit, I fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ." In John 15:5 Jesus is talking. He says, "I am the vine, you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit. But apart from Me you can do nothing." If you are

not preparing yourself spiritually for the ministry you're in -- whether you're a greeter or an usher or a hostess or whatever, it's not counting. But if you are spiritually preparing yourself, saying, "Lord, I realize that today in our church there will be 5000 plus people who will come across this patio. May I just touch a few of them with the love of Jesus Christ." Then it counts. You do it in the power of the Holy Spirit. You don't just do it in the power of your own personality. Some of you are just naturally vivacious. But what impresses people in a spiritual sense is when somebody's had their heart prepared and love is just coming through them. You can tell. Even if you've only got a split second chance to pat somebody on the back, or care for them, it makes a difference.

Zechariah 4:6 says, "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit," says the Lord." 1 Corinthians 2. Notice how Paul ministered. Many of us think that Paul was a super confident guy, always felt like he knew everything, had it all together, never had any doubts or fears or failings. "When I came to you, brothers, I didn't come with eloquence or superior wisdom. As I proclaimed to you the testimony about God I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear and in much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise

persuasive words but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom but on God's power." God says He'd rather take a weakling and use them. Why? Because people will say, "It must be God. I know that person. Look how God is using that person's life to effectively change other people, to touch children, youth, college students, men, women, businessmen in our church. Ordinary people being used in extraordinary ways." That's what God wants to do. It's performed in God's power. On my strength alone, I can't do it. But on God's strength "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

5. The ministry that is effective, that God blesses, is planned according to God's purpose.

Paul says, "It's always been my ambition..." Circle that. Is it ok to have ambition? Sure it is. You'd better have an ambition. Your ambition better be to fulfill God's life mission for your life and the ministry that He's given you. Paul says, "It's always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known. But now there is no more place for me to work in these regions. I plan to do so when I go to Spain." Notice that Paul

made plans. Some of you think you should just get up in the morning and say, "Lord, what do You want me to do today?" and kind of free-float through life. I don't think so at all. I think life's too important to go without a plan. I think we need to be strategic. If you read the book of Acts, Paul had a very clear strategy. His strategy was to go to the key cities in the Roman Empire and all the places he went -- Ephesus, Corinth, Philippi, Colosse, all these major places were all trade centers, travel centers, crossroads in the Roman Empire. He said I know I can't get everywhere so I'm going to go to the most strategic places I can and spread the Gospel there.

God has given us a tremendous privilege of being in one of the most strategic places in America. Orange County has such a powerful influence on California. And California has such a powerful influence on the United States. And the United States has so much powerful influence on the world. If I knew a more strategic place to be, I'd leave for it tonight. I want my life to count. If we can reach the people in this area – the movers and shakers of Orange county – we will have made a significant dent in the devil's territory.

Paul was strategic. Fortunately we're in a strategic area. So we need to take this very seriously. People sometimes think

planning is unspiritual but I suggest you read all these Proverbs I've listed because they all talk about how God says He wants you to plan. The Bible says it's foolish not to plan. The wise person plans. That's why I've passed out these questions. Our staff is continually planning and saying, "God, You've taken us here so far. Now where do You want us to go tomorrow?"

We're always looking forward and planning. Why? Because souls are in the balance. We're talking about heaven or hell here and eternity in the balance for many lives. We take it very seriously to plan and strategize and say what is the maximum way to use our resources for the glory of God and take the most people to heaven with us as we can on the way, while we're having fun! Because you rarely do something unless you have fun in doing it anyway. Fortunately, ministry is fun. It's hard, but it's fun. Somebody asked Billy Graham, "Do you ever get tired of ministry?" He said, "I get tired in the ministry but I don't get tired of the ministry." That's true of me. I get tired in the ministry, but never tired of it. There is nothing more significant than helping influence people's lives in a positive way for the Good News. That's what you're doing.

6. It's supported by God's people.

Here he's specifically talking about financial support. But I think it's talking about financial support in every way. He says, "For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution. Indeed, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings." I look out at Saddleback Valley and see guys and ladies in their 20's and 30's at an economic level that it took their parents 60 or 70 years to get to. Some of their parents never got to that level. You'd probably agree that it's easier to climb the ladder of success faster than it used to be. Many people in this area are living at an economic level that was a lifetime goal in the last generation to eventually get to and they're already there and they're still at a young age. Now you say, "What am I supposed to do with the rest of my life?" If there's anything I want to say to this Valley is, It's time to give something back. "To whom much is given, much is required." We give back of our time, back of our money, back of our energy and our service.

That makes me think of a story of one time a pastor was preaching down in the south. He was getting all wired up and says, "This church has got to get up and walk!" And all the people said, "Amen, pastor! It's got to walk!" Then he said, "Folks, our church has got to get up and run. We've got to run with the Gospel." And everybody said, "Amen, the church has

got to get up and run! Run with the Gospel.” Then he said, “I tell you, brothers, the church has got to get up and fly! It’s got to fly with the good news all over.” They said, “Yes, it’s got to fly! Let it fly.” Then he said, “It takes money to fly.” And they said, “Let it walk, pastor. Let it walk!”

It takes money to have a ministry. It takes our money and it takes other people’s money. You don’t have to be afraid of that. When you teach people how to give you’re doing one of the greatest blessing you can do for them. You’re teaching them to be like God because God is a giver. I used to be nervous about sharing teaching on giving. But I’m not at all any more. In fact, I love to teach on it. I know what it’s going to do for that person. There are more promises regarding giving than any other thing in the Bible. When I’m not being generous, I’m just hurting myself.

7. A ministry that’s effective is backed by prayer.

He says, “Join me in my struggle [how?] by praying to God for me. Pray that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea and that my service in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints

there.” He says we join in each other’s ministry when we pray for each other’s ministry. You, as a part of the body of Christ, need to pray not just for the area of ministry you’re in but you need to pray for all the other ministries. Together, we’re a symphony. Everybody plays their part. The tunes are the same but the sounds are different. An oboe doesn’t sound like a flute and a flute doesn’t sound like a trumpet and a trumpet doesn’t sound like a violin. But we’re all reading from the same score.

This is our score. The Bible. It tells us that we’re to go out into the world and we’re to attract, win, and develop members into mature models of Christlike character and conduct and help them discover a ministry in the church and a life mission in the world at each stage and segment of their lives. That’s our plan. We’re all working toward it in various areas. Some people are on the front end, the attraction end. Some people are at the welcoming stage. Some people are at the incorporating stage, bringing them into Bible studies. Some people are at the training stage. Some people are at the sending out stage. Some people are at the going out stage. But all together, it forms a symphony and makes us the body of Christ. He says we need to pray for each other.

About Rick Warren

Rick Warren is the founding pastor of [Saddleback Church](#) in Lake Forest, Calif., one of America's largest and most influential churches. Rick is author of the New York Times bestseller [The Purpose Driven Life](#). His book, [The Purpose Driven Church](#), was named one of the 100 Christian books that changed the 20th century. He is also founder of [Pastors.com](#), a global Internet community for pastors.

